

Local coalitions in the Czech Republic: Crucial cohesion factor*

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Abstract

During the local election period 2014–2018, the Czech Republic experienced a previously unseen surge in governing coalition breakdowns at the level of municipal administration. Judging by the election results, these numerous coalition crises were caused primarily by the weakening of established parties, which appeared unready to fight the appeal of the ANO 2011 party. The failure to maintain and establish internal and external political networks in more than half of coalitions took its toll mainly on the economic and infrastructural development of the affected cities. The purpose of this article is to present an exploratory comparative analysis of Czech statutory cities that avoided, survived or succumbed to a coalition breakdown in the defined election period. The fact that ANO 2011 links all the cases of breakdown supports a general assumption that both its intra-party organization and inter-party coalition behaviour lack the necessary cohesion to last in a coalition government. ANO 2011 emerges from the analysis as an uncooperative party true to its anti-system and anti-party rhetoric, with an extremely high fluctuation of ambitious representatives and extremely low tradition of political conformity, respect for hierarchy and coalition loyalty at the municipal level.

Keywords: coalition breakdown; local government; statutory cities

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1. Introduction

Local politics in the Czech Republic have rarely experienced a more unstable period than after the elections of 2014. Quite unexpectedly, during the election period 2014–2018, local coalitions in Czech cities and towns tumbled almost like dominoes. Coalition breakdowns might have been unexpected in the Czech Republic but have already been studied

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empirically in international academic research. Academic research in this field is based on a rich foundation of coalition formation and coalition governing models derived mainly from the national level of analysis. In coalition-making, we generally know that actors can follow the game theory scenario, driven by policy-seeking, office-seeking or vote-seeking incentives (Luebbert, 1986). Laver and Shepsle (1996) directed further research into two inherently connected agendas – the motivations of political parties in government formation and the motivations of individual politicians pursuing their career ambitions. The role of individual motivations is restrained by the assumption that actors operate in accordance with party policy and the ideology that they represented in the elections. Nevertheless, Laver and Shepsle (1996) admit that the strict evaluation of actors based on game theory, applied to parties or politicians, is flawed. One cannot assume that these actors make decision in an ideal rational environment, pursuing their perfectly rational political programmes. There are cases when national governments reach such levels of rationality, especially when deciding about risk-free publicly anticipated and necessary policies. However, local governments further elude the ideal scenario by elevating the role of politicians as locally known individuals with, more often than not, independent agendas differing from party policy. Furthermore, when these individuals operate within new parties, which have not yet established a strong intra-party organization and hierarchy, predicting their coalition behaviour becomes increasingly difficult.

Warwick (1996) argues that parties with experience in government are more likely to succeed in forming and remaining in a coalition. Lupia and Strøm (2003) concur and associate successful coalition maintenance with parties that have repeatedly joined coalitions and have established mutual trust and operating procedures among themselves. Once within a coalition, the outcomes are most efficient if coalition partners establish open communication and trust, secure a majoritarian bargaining position and operate in accordance with the ‘fear of exclusion’ principle (Diermeier, 2008). Bäck (2003) was one of the first authors to test these viewpoints at the local level and found that policy-seeking, office-seeking and vote-seeking variables can be used to predict the coalition outcomes on both national and local levels (in her analysis of Swedish local government formation). Indeed, parties more or less united along ideological and policy lines with experience in government are certainly well equipped to negotiate and govern with expertise. However, this premise disregards the intra-party environment, individual bargaining capacities and, most importantly, voting preferences, which at the local level often support independent and ideologically undefined candidates or a completely new party, as was the case in the Czech Republic.

Roughly every fifth city in the Czech Republic experienced a breakdown of the local governing coalition during the local election period 2014–2018. Coalitions in Czech regions also caught the sickness and both Central and South Bohemian regions suffered breakdowns shortly after the 2016 regional elections. Judging by the election results, these numerous coalition crises at all levels were caused primarily by the weakening of established parties, which appeared unready to counter the appeal of new political groups. The volatile variable of the political group called ANO 2011 (ANO), officially registered only in 2012, connects all of these coalition breakdowns. Simultaneously, it defines the research question of this article: How does the coalition behaviour of the ANO party influence the

stability of local government coalitions? Considering the number of documented coalition breakdowns, the local governments of statutory cities seems to be the ideal sample for a thorough analysis. The Czech Republic consists of many strong, financially independent and autonomous urban governments, governed by collective political leadership. Most legislation is implemented directly at the local level so the breakdown of governing coalitions often means paralysis for city governments, which operate with yearly budgets of billions of Euros. The paralysis is noticeable particularly when it comes to strategic decisions about public services and projects. The city of Ostrava, for example, lost a funding opportunity of 4.8 million Euros to be used on intelligent transport systems (ČTK, 2015a). In Ústí nad Labem, a public tender for municipal services worth 3.1 million Euros was the main point on the agenda of the last city council meeting before the coalition breakdown (Vorlíček, 2015). Instead of making a decision, the coalition removed the mayor and the city was left without effective political leadership for almost a year. In Brno, the coalition broke down while deciding about merging nine city companies, with a combined annual turnover of almost 353 million Euros (Kozelka, 2015). During such a moment of paralysis in Prague, more than 1.7 billion Euros in current expenditures and more than 667 million Euros in investment expenditures for the year 2016 were divided in the absence of councillors for key areas of territorial development, education, city property and sport (ČTK, 2015b). In this unstable environment, together with an already very limited four-year election period, coalition breakdowns become a concern not only for politicians but also for civil society at large, where the paralysis of city development can have profound effects in daily life.

The purpose of this article is to present an exploratory comparative analysis of all the Czech statutory cities that have either experienced, overcome or prevented a governing coalition breakdown in the election period 2014–2018. Successful cohesion followed by stable coalition cooperation was the norm in thirteen statutory cities – Děčín, Pardubice, Třinec, Karviná, Mladá Boleslav, Kladno, Zlín, Prostějov, Jablonec nad Nisou, Teplice, Olomouc, Plzeň and Hradec Králové. Lack of cohesion, followed by a political crisis and terminating in a coalition breakdown has been documented in fourteen cities – Prague, Opava, Ostrava, Frýdek-Místek, Most, Ústí nad Labem, České Budějovice, Karlovy Vary, Brno, Havířov, Liberec, Jihlava, Chomutov and Přerov. The fact that the ANO party links all these breakdowns confirms the assumption that actors in local government do not always behave rationally and that the coalition behaviour of new, anti-establishment political parties can considerably affect the development of a city by destabilizing its government. In comparison to the previous election period of 2010–2014, during which only four governments out of all the Czech statutory cities suffered a coalition breakdown, the number of breakdowns grew more than thrice in the following election period. The frequent and scarcely explored coalition breakdowns in the Czech Republic prove that the length and quality of previous coalition-making and coalition-maintaining practices are irrelevant when chaos is introduced by such an intervening variable. This article proceeds to outline a theory tracing coalition formation, coalition breakdowns and the applied methodology. Further, using statistical data, legislative documents and media research for the case studies, the article searches for the critical variable contrasting the cases of successful and unsuccessful coalitions, noting in particular the characteristics of cohesion

within the successful coalitions. This comparative overview is intended to serve as a pilot analysis of the reasons for and development of the overwhelming and unprecedented number of coalition breakdowns in the contemporary Czech Republic.

2. Theoretical underpinnings

In recent years, a new academic wave of authors has left behind the traditional rationalist theories that were mentioned in the introduction above, preferring a more empiricist approach. In particular, Tzelgov (2015) analyzes cases of 'junior' coalition members who take upon themselves the role of the opposition when faced with severe and unpopular policy issues. In accordance with assumptions about vote-seeking behaviour, inexperienced parties are more likely to avoid blame and distance themselves from the coalition's declared policy than experienced parties, which tend to favour the coalition's survival and to preserve their position in office. However, Tzelgov (2015) researched chaotic coalition behaviour in Greece during painful austerity measures that affected more than ten million citizens. The duration and failure of coalitions with national level case studies is indeed well researched and Tzelgov's arguments are corroborated by Sanders and Herman (1977) and Strøm, Müller and Bergman (2008). Their research shares the premise of coalition breakdown occurs in most cases following unpredictable external crises that shock the national economy and institutional setting by requiring unpopular and acute decisions, with long-term social consequences. The ability of a governing coalition to withstand such crises rests in its structural attributes, ideological preferences, the cooperation of supporting institutions, bargaining environment, time, and the nature of the critical event (Strøm, Müller, & Bergman, 2008). Coalition-breaking at the local level, on the other hand, is less researched and is rarely a consequence of national government dilemmas or economic and social crises.

Wolman, Weir and Swanstrom (2005) also confirm that the aforementioned traditional coalition-maintaining strategies do not influence local coalitions to such an extent in times of crisis and these cases of Czech statutory cities are the most current examples. At the local level, lesser responsibilities, fewer institutional checks and varying degrees of autonomy are replaced by greater personal involvement, voters' demands and intra-party politics. Further academic research on local governments has attempted to narrow down the numerous routes to stability and the efficiency of urban coalition governments, which have been proved to often rely on the leadership skills of a few individuals. One of the most applicable is the empirically rich research of Sweeting and Hambleton (2004), who devised three umbrella categories to describe leadership in urban governance: a) designed and focused, which follows a unique vision under the firm guidance of a mayor and his dedicated staff; b) emergent and formative, which links pragmatic organizational and inter-organizational cooperation on achievable common goals; and c) implicit and fragmented, without direction or integration, swayed by unstable allegiances and partial deals on favourable policies. The last form of leadership is the most likely to end in a breakdown of unstable allegiances and consequently in a ruling coalition breakdown. Each of the

approaches is greatly influenced by the changing societal, economic and political frameworks within a locality. Teles (2016) works with the concepts of leadership and loyalty on the level of inter-municipal cooperation and confirms that if coalitions at the local level are to be successful, high levels of organization, loyalty and trustful collaboration must be held to high standards within parties as well as all coalition members. The various modern and flexible leadership-oriented strategies can be broadly united into a perspective of networks, which function most efficiently within local government scenarios (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992; Rhodes, 2017; Powell, 1991). A network is a structure fostering collaboration through confidence, the flow of information, complementarity of skills and the pressure of social conformity between peers (Assens & Lemeur, 2016, p. 2). Networks naturally change with political, economic and social processes within a society. They are inherently shaped by the leadership and communication abilities of politicians. Finally, each level of government has its own specific political networks, making the differing processes of local and national coalitions possible. By following the afore-mentioned strand of research, this article shifts the traditional understanding of coalition maintaining (and breaking) towards fluctuating leadership-based *networks*, which provides more options for analysis. It is only through such a use of the deeper background of the traditional research that one can understand the phenomenon of the Czech local coalition breakdowns.

In Czech academic research, authors such as Balík, Cabada and Jüptner have been the most influential for our knowledge about local coalitions. Cabada (2006) organizes the theoretical pillars of coalition formation at all levels in the Czech context. Balík (2008; 2009), later in cooperation with Havlík (2011), introduces a typology of Czech coalitions based on their ideological proximity. He also translates the leadership concept into Czech local politics and lays the groundwork by researching the personalization and individualization of political elites at the local level (Balík & Smolková, 2018). In his research on similar theories at the local level of small and medium-sized municipalities, Jüptner (2004; 2006) finds that such coalitions are rarely united by one ideology and political stance. The path to understanding coalitions becomes tricky once researchers reach the problem of the level of analysis. Coalitions at the national level of government and at the level of local politics are often formed with diametrically different procedures and forms of behaviour. Therefore, country-specific knowledge of small local coalitions is essential for small-n research, since socio-economic and ideological factors play an immense role in the behaviour of political subjects. At the same time, most research on local coalitions has been based on research on national coalitions, and a synthesis of new approaches with the traditional well-researched theories is necessary.

The synthesis in this article is accomplished by accepting that neither national nor local governments are self-preserving organisms in blind rational pursuit of re-election (vote-seeking), holding political posts (office-seeking) and fulfilling policy programmes (policy-seeking). As the level of analysis descends towards local government, actors within coalitions are less rational and are less inclined to pursue their interests in the coalition network through cooperative and collective action. The consequent definition of a coalition breakdown thus needs to be derived from a synthesis of actor-centred and environment-centred approaches. This article uses the most updated definition by Grotz and Weber (2012), who state that a coalition breakdown usually follows after a change

in the partisan composition of governing coalition (or end of an election term). The change is caused by the ideological dimensions of party interaction, and the characteristics of party strength (Grofman & Van Roozendaal, 1997, p. 427). Or, in updated words, it is a change in the internal configurations of a coalition, such as ideological differences, the degree of polarization and the features of the party system (Woldendorp, Keman, & Budge, 2000, p. 78). Grotz and Weber (2012) continue to test this definition in the context of Central and Eastern European democracies and prove, following up on the research of Müller-Rommel, Fettelschoss and Harfst (2004), that the two-fold definition is most accurate for this region, which is characterized by more cases of unstable party systems and volatile politics than in Western Europe. The next section on methodology applies these theoretical underpinnings to present a new comparative approach at the level of local politics within Czech Republic.

3. Methodology

The chosen level of analysis is the most empirically rich, with more than half of Czech statutory cities experiencing a coalition breakdown within the years 2014–2018. However, coalition breakdowns were observed during the same time period also at the regional level and in great numbers at the smaller municipality level. Their relationship of correlation or causation with the level of statutory cities is yet to be researched. So far, the level of statutory cities provides for an ideal pilot analysis and as a possible starting point for a comprehensive overview of various types of coalition breakdowns. The literature proves that parties in a coalition cannot be regarded as unitary actors because parties are certainly not always internally cohesive along ideological and policy lines (Laver & Schofield, 1998; Luebbert, 1986; Bäck, 2008). This feature increases as the level of analysis narrows to local and municipal coalitions and applies to coalition formation as well as coalition breakdown – the higher the internal factionalization of parties and individuals, the lower the ability of a party as a coalition member to negotiate during the coalition's existence and during its fall. When the coalition parties attempt to address a critical policy issue in a tense bargaining environment and with general mistrust (within and among parties), the coalition quickly loses its power and authority to manage its institutions and administration of the city (Strøm, Müller, & Bergman, 2008). In addition, the various ambitions and incentives of local party leaders and party members block inter/intra-party discussion and decision-making within a coalition is very unlikely to take place (Bäck, 2008). Leadership descends into the implicit and fragmented category, without direction, swayed by unstable allegiances and partial deals on favourable policies (Sweeting & Hambleton, 2004). The inability to exist in a coalition means an end not only of a coalition policy agenda but also an end of decision-making. Such a breakdown is not a result of irrational political behaviour but of a failure to exist in a broader network of information-sharing, mutual confidence, social pre-requisites and skills-sharing (Assens & Lemeur, 2016).

Therefore, the critical phase of cohesion within a local coalition and within its members defines its existence. It determines whether a coalition will be successful or unsuccess-

cessful and result in a breakdown. This distinction will be used for comparison of the Czech cities in the following section as it reflects the traditional research but also examines coalition breakdown internally from the local party and local government perspectives. Cohesion has been chosen as the criterion of comparison, since it indicates the level of loyalty and collaborative arrangement, which goes beyond party borders to achieve specific policy actions (Teles, 2016, p. 10). Absence of cohesion in inter/intra-party cooperation means the onset of political conflict. The cases within this criterion can fall into three groups, based on whether the coalition government leans towards the lack of intra-party cohesion, lack of inter-party cohesion, or borders on both. Lack of intra-party cohesion is defined as a crisis of political identity, organizational rules and respected hierarchy. Lack of inter-party cohesion is defined as a basic lack of loyalty to the declared and sworn coalition cooperation and coalition programme. Failure in intra/inter-party cohesion leads to a political crisis and can escalate into coalition breakdown. A party in a coalition may fight for dominance and survival by ignoring previous intra/inter-party agreements and trying to re-negotiate its majority position, and by re-establishing itself as a strong party. An individual may try to leave his party and join a stronger one, or force a putsch in the party to change leadership settings. Relevant actors know that being the weak coalition member when breakdown comes will most likely prevent them from joining the new government (Laver & Shepsle, 1996, p. 105). The empirical evidence in the following case study is comprised of descriptive statistical data, legislative documents and media research and serves as the basis for this exploratory analysis. Further research should follow up on these sources and involve in-depth semi-structured interviews with local politicians and bureaucrats to map out the reasons, processes and consequences of coalition breakdowns in urban governments.

4. Case analysis

The election period 2014–2018 is unique for its increased number of coalition crises in statutory cities and simultaneous rapid and unexpected rise in the number of votes for newly established political parties. Until the local elections of 2014, the urban (as well as the national, regional and municipal) political scene was dominated by traditional established parties – the Czech Social Democratic party (ČSSD), Civil Democratic party (ODS) and Czech Communist party (KSČM), with minor interventions from the Christian Democratic party (KDU-ČSL) and the Green party (SZ). After 2010, the TOP 09 party became a stable actor, as well as STAN (Mayors and Independents) at the municipal level, together with other moderately popular local parties (Czech Statistical Office, 2014a). The dominant parties had a history of active and stable engagement in post-revolutionary politics in the Czech Republic. As is typical for established parties, they are ideologically defined, hierarchically organized with strong local, regional and national leadership and focus on relatively fixed political goals. Cohesion is therefore one of the defining characteristics of established parties, with intra-party organization and hierarchy usually translating into inter-party coalition cooperation.

To illustrate the relatively stable local political scene, during the election period of 2010–2014 only four statutory city governments ended prematurely. In Prague, three factors contributed to breakdown: assembly member corruption scandals, fights over powerful positions on supervisory and executive boards of city companies and arguments over budget expenditures. Renegotiation of the coalition took place in 2011 and again in 2013 (Kopecký, 2011; ČTK, 2013). In Ústí nad Labem, a de-facto coalition breakdown occurred in 2012 when two ODS coalition members were dismissed. Nevertheless, ČSSD, the majority coalition member, continued governing the city with operational support from the opposition when needed (ČTK, 2012). This coalition breakdown was thus not perceived as such by the coalition members themselves and had no effect on government administration. A similar quasi-breakdown occurred in Karlovy Vary, where a very fragile coalition created after lengthy negotiations in 2010 was ‘updated’ a year later by assimilating ODS as a strong member (Plechátá, 2012). Lastly, in 2011 the original coalition in Liberec shifted after personal differences and communication problems forced the mayor to resign and his local political party (Změna pro Liberec) was forced into the opposition after just five months in government (ČTK, 2014).

In the 2010–2014 period, traditional and well-established political parties could still be relied on to ‘save the day’ and control the reins of government. At the same time, the concept of new parties was already known in Czech politics, especially at the urban and municipal levels, where new parties and political groups often participated in councils and sometimes even in governing coalitions. These groups and parties were often organized only at the municipal level and usually focused on local problems, and they continue to do so today. The prototype of the typical new party started to change with the establishment of the Věci Veřejné party (VV) in 2001 and later TOP 09, both of which managed to win seats in parliament thanks to re-inventing and re-formulating conservative democratic topics – and in the case of TOP 09, adding a populist twist and modernity to politics (Hanley, 2011). However, it was not until the local elections of 2014 that a previously unseen type of populist political newcomer, the ANO party, overran the established political elites at the local level and later also in regional and national elections, as documented by Havlík and Voda (2016; 2018), who provide detailed evidence based on aggregate data as to the shift in voter preferences from traditional parties to anti-establishment and populist parties. In the electoral period of 2014–2018, no other new party was as successful as ANO in terms of its defining features and coalition maintaining (in)abilities. Unlike other new local political actors, ANO was established in a top-down manner in cities across the Czech Republic, disregarding local issues and existing (political) groups of active citizens that had already formed around these issues.

With a generous budget and a modern campaign strategy, ANO had an advantage in electoral campaigns and won the ‘hearts and minds’ of Czech voters. In the elections of 2014, ANO gathered the majority of votes in nine statutory cities, followed by local political groups and only after by established parties. Victory in elections came hand in hand with victory in coalition formation. ANO became a coalition member in eighteen out of the twenty-seven Czech statutory cities. The party’s winning populist strategy lay in emphasizing its novelty, its anti-systemic and anti-party stances, and in presenting a strong national party leader who was more visible than the party itself (Šárovec, 2018).

Consequently, after succeeding in the elections, ANO became a coalition member who defied the traditional systems of politics and party organization, thereby inhibiting the creation of cohesive coalitions. ANO took part in thirteen out of fourteen city coalition breakdowns. This is a startling contrast to the previous election period of 2010–2014, during which the coalitions that were formed largely by established parties aided by a few local new parties endured throughout the whole term with only the four exceptions described above. This analysis of the 2014–2018 election period divides cities into those with successful coalition outcomes and unsuccessful coalition outcomes, to be analyzed according to the cohesion criteria.

4.1. Successful coalition outcomes

Thirteen statutory cities managed to avoid complete coalition breakdown due to several, primarily cohesive, intra/inter-party factors which play an important comparative role in this research. Out of these thirteen ‘survivalist’ cities, Třinec is excluded from the analysis, since it became a statutory city only on 31 August 2018 and had a fairly stable coalition government in the 2014–2018 election period, which continued after the 2018 elections (without any coalition participation by ANO). Seven of the cities with successful coalition governments from 2014 to 2018 did not include ANO as a coalition party. These cities were Prostějov, Jablonec nad Nisou, Teplice, Olomouc, Plzeň, Hradec Králové and Karviná. It is important to note that the coalitions in these cities, as summarized in *Table 1*, were composed mostly of traditional established parties, in continuity with the fairly stable election period of 2010–2014. In Prostějov, ČSSD took over the coalition with the aid of KSČM and the PěVěČko party (composed of former ODS members). In Jablonec nad Nisou, the reins of the coalition were divided between ČSSD and ODS with the aid of TOP 09 and two local supportive coalition members. The coalition in Teplice formed under similar circumstances with ČSSD, ODS and TOP 09 in government. Olomouc also followed this formation with the addition of KDU-ČSL. In Plzeň, the formula of ODS and ČSSD was also repeated with the addition of KDU-ČSL and the support of one local party. Hradec Králové relied on ČSSD, TOP 09 and two supportive local parties for successful government. Lastly, Karviná chose to continue with the historically strong cooperation of ČSSD and KSČM. As stated above, the traditional parties all fulfil the cohesion criterion, as they share a historically stable and lengthy presence on the Czech political scene, during which they have established and codified their political identities, location on the political spectrum, organizational rules and respected hierarchies at the levels of local, regional and national party units. Internal party loyalty, then, insures adherence to the coalition programme as a group with minimal rebellion by individual party members.

Three statutory cities managed to live through the election period 2014–2018 without a coalition breakdown with ANO as a member of the coalition – Mladá Boleslav, Kladno and Zlín. Research on these coalitions is limited since they were stable and cooperative. However, the cohesive factor is still the explanation of this stability, since the power relations within these coalitions depended on the traditional parties. In all three of these

cases, ANO was a complementary party chosen by stronger coalition partners and did not have a majority in any of these city councils; hence, it had very limited opportunities for blocking decisions and initiating inter-party tension and instead tried to secure and maintain power even as a supportive coalition member. In Mladá Boleslav, ODS and TOP 09 took the majority with ANO and one local party as supportive coalition members. In a coalition council of eleven members, ANO held only two seats. In Kladno, a local party (Volba pro Kladno) and KSČM took seven positions, leaving ANO with two seats at the coalition table. Zlín offered eleven positions in the city council, with seven dominated by STAN (Mayors and Independents) and four left for ANO.

The last two cities, Děčín and Pardubice, were the only to offer the mayor's chair to an ANO party member together with an influential number of councillors. The long life of these two coalitions with ANO in a strong position appears to be due to the qualified leadership of both mayors, who unlike their representative parties in other cities, had life-long experience in local politics and city administration. This experience and knowledge of local political and social specifics gave the mayors natural cohesive qualities. The mayor of Děčín, Marie Blažková, born and raised in the city, held numerous high posts in Děčín's financial and social infrastructure before deciding to lead the ANO party's candidate list in the 2014 elections as an impartial candidate (Angermannová, 2018). Her coalition was formed of colleagues who either already had previously participated in local government or were active citizens in the community (Vanžura, 2014). In Pardubice, the mayor's situation was similar. Martin Charvát, also a dedicated citizen of Pardubice, was engaged in the city's urban planning, reconstruction and investment long before he decided to use this experience in politics. Furthermore, for many years he was a member of ODS, a well-established right-wing traditional Czech party (Public register, 2019). His switch to the ANO candidate list was not so much for ideological reasons but rather due to a logical calculation of his office-seeking chances, since he first succeeded in an elected position only after his transfer to ANO. Aside from the mayor's strong and stable position in both cities, the level of political and community involvement and/or public administration experience of the councillors was reliably high, with most of these positions continuing from the previous election period (Czech Statistical Office, 2014b). The following research on ANO's involvement in local coalitions utilizes the same approach to analyze the remaining fourteen cases, which lacked intra-party cohesion, inter-party cohesion, or a combination of both, and therefore failed in coalition governance.

4.2. Unsuccessful coalition outcomes

As described in the methodology section, cohesion indicates the level of loyalty and collaborative arrangement, which goes beyond party boundaries to achieve specific policy actions. Cohesion in a coalition government is twofold, however, since a political party must achieve both internal cohesion composed of shared political identity, organizational rules and respected hierarchy, and external cohesion, in which the declared principles of inter-party cooperation and the shared policy programme are respected. When exploring the conditions of governing coalitions in Czech statutory cities, lack of cohesion was

apparently the most burning problem appearing immediately after governing coalitions were established in the city halls.

4.2.1. Lack of intra-party cohesion

In Ústí nad Labem, ANO members celebrated their great electoral success but soon after took most of the blame for the coalition breakdown, since ANO assemblymen removed their own ANO mayor and replaced him, together with other coalition partners, no more than eight months after the elections. The nature of the conflict lay deep in interpersonal intra-party relations since the party consisted of a few long-standing political figures with intertwined pasts in other political parties (so-called professional politicians) standing against newcomers from different professional backgrounds who envisioned a radical change (Horáček, 2015). Therefore, personal conflicts arose immediately in an environment without intra-party structures and mutual respect for the hierarchy. The consequent putsch was a shock for the national ANO party organization, which retaliated by dissolving the regional ANO party organization in Ústí nad Labem and demanded the resignation of the disobedient party members. The ‘rebels,’ however, refused to resign and managed to keep the newly formed coalition functional until the end of the election term despite the displeasure of the national party (Horáček, 2015). A similar scenario of coalition breakdown took place in Opava. After winning the elections, the ANO party in the city government split into two branches, thereby losing the majority of coalition votes in the city council. ANO members in Opava had been recruited as ‘celebrity’ representatives from the politically active segments of society, despite having little actual political experience. As opposed to ANO members who switched to the party after political careers in different parts of the political spectrum, the political newcomers were reportedly overly ambitious and greedy (Telaříková, 2015). The disgraced ANO national party organization again resorted to dissolving the regional party branch in Opava and had to accept the fact that the city’s coalition continued without ANO (ČTK, 2015d).

4.2.2. Lack of inter-party cohesion

Ostrava, Chomutov, Jihlava, Přerov and Most are perhaps the only cities that appear to have suffered a coalition breakdown due to ‘standard’ inter-party coalition feuds and not intra-party rivalry. In Ostrava, the ANO party declared that they ‘had all indications’ to believe that their coalition partner ČSSD was planning a putsch and therefore rushed to outrun them with their own version of changes to the city government (Kucej, 2015). An ANO member allegedly tried to secretly lure other coalition partners into reforming the coalition and exclude some existing partners. He later declared that this was only a trick to test the loyalty of other coalition partners. However, such actions shook the trust within the coalition and two months later ANO repeated this strategy in all seriousness and renegotiated the new coalition in order to secure the majority of seats and exclude ČSSD, their strongest coalition rival (Lesková, 2015). Coalition breakdown in Chomutov was initiated

by a policy issue that fractured inter-party loyalty within the coalition when ANO, the strongest coalition partner, was accused of corruption (Strnadová, 2016). The topic of controversy was financial support for the city's hockey club and its links to ANO. Financial gifts from club accounts to the ANO party, and the reciprocal financial support for the club from the city budget, seemed to be no coincidence, given the fact that the club CEO was simultaneously an ANO city councillor (Strnadová, 2016). This affair enabled ČSSD to take the coalition reins and form a new coalition, in which ANO played only a supportive role.

In Jihlava, policy disputes also resulted in a coalition breakdown, which gave ANO a chance to participate in the newly formed coalition after being in the opposition for two years despite gaining the most popular votes in the 2014 elections (Pavlíček, 2016). The inter-party problems in Jihlava oscillated around urban spatial planning and industrial projects. A representative of a local party, Forum Jihlava, was dissatisfied with the lack of vision and progress made by the established parties in the coalition and resigned in protest. The subsequent discussions and arguments resulted in a coalition breakdown and a window of opportunity for ANO, which offered new and fresh approaches to local politics, while respecting the power positions of ČSSD and KDU-ČSL (Jirků, 2016). In Přerov, disagreement started almost in synchrony with the creation of the coalition and included failed communication with the public, too much autonomy of the city bureaucracy and the lack of transparency of the city government (ČTK, 2017). Two coalition partners decided to exit the coalition, leaving ANO with another coalition party standing alone and unable to execute decisions. The inter-party turmoil came as no surprise, since Přerov had been used to a stable two-party coalition government for 16 years before new parties were elected. Since disagreement was a signature feature of the coalition since its establishment in 2014, no new formation replaced it after its breakdown in 2017. Reportedly, nothing could save the paralyzed governance of the city, so the remaining coalition partners governed in minority and tried to secure opposition support before voting on every individual policy (ČTK, 2017). A similar scenario played out in the city of Most, with the official reason for coalition breakdown being failed communication between the winning party, Severočesí Most, and ANO, the newcomers. When the breakdown seemed imminent, it was further fuelled by attempts at bribery and blackmail committed by ANO members in order to secure their position in the new coalition (Kassal, 2015). These attempts were unsuccessful, and the new coalition governed in a stable formation of traditional parties without ANO until the elections of 2018.

4.2.3. Combination of intra/inter-party lack of cohesion

In Prague, the situation escalated perhaps the most, since the victory of ANO in the elections and their involvement in capital city governance was not only under heavy public and media scrutiny but also subject to high expectations from national ANO party representatives. However, ANO was not able to withstand much pressure, and after criticism by a coalition councillor (from Trojkoalice), the problems soon magnified into a declared 'complete loss of trust' among coalition partners (Prchal, 2015). The possibly personal inter-party conflict was translated into professional incompetence resulting in

stripping the councillor of his assigned purview of territorial development, threatening an imminent coalition breakdown in response from his party (Rovenský, 2015). At the same time, intra-party distrust among ANO members of the Prague assembly weakened the position of the incompetent mayor in the midst of the coalition crisis. The coalition breakdown lasted for six months, during which the capital city's governance was paralyzed. It was most probably the negotiations among national party representatives that stabilized Prague's coalition re-negotiation and manufactured a fragile stability reinstating the pre-breakdown composition that lasted until the elections of 2018 (Nachtmann, 2015). Liberec followed Prague in most aspects of its coalition breakdown. Again, a personal conflict between the ANO mayor with a councillor and coalition partner was seen as indicating an inability to manage the latter's portfolio of territorial government and was presented as a reason for her removal by the mayor. Even though the mayor hastily renamed the councillor back to the position when he realized it might threaten his government, this escapade set in motion events that would cause friction with coalition partner *Změna pro Liberec* (Pšeničková, 2016). As was the case in Přerov, negotiations for a new coalition did not take place and the breakdown caused paralysis for more than a year.

A similar mixture of intra/inter-party feuds led to the fall of the coalition in Brno as well. The starting point of conflict was not the mayor but a councillor (and ANO member) who sparked harsh criticism within the regional ANO branch almost as soon as he was placed in the coalition government. The mistrust and suspicion within the councillor's own party escalated the coalition crisis, particularly for KDU-ČSL, which had a problem with ANO (particularly with its vision of the management of city companies) from the outset of cooperation (Valášek, 2015). Assembly members for ANO brought this conflict to the coalition table which initiated a rapid disintegration of the coalition, when they declared that they were looking for a new coalition partner. KDU-ČSL responded by negotiating with ČSSD on a new government without ANO (ČTK, 2016a). However, KDU-ČSL was not strong enough to force ANO out and settled for being included in the new coalition under the ANO majority. Karlovy Vary followed an almost identical path with their ANO councillor, who despite being expelled from the ANO party, remained a standing member of the coalition. The coalition formed alliances and took sides in this controversy regardless of party affiliation and soon enough disintegrated completely (ČTK, 2015c). The lack of cohesion was reflected in the new coalition, which resembled the previous but with two additional seats in the city council to appease almost all political players in the city.

České Budějovice is an example of a city with a less than clear-cut distinction between a lack of inter- and intra-party cohesion. The opposition in the city assembly, as is its right, demanded the deposition of the mayor (an ANO party member) due to incompetence and ineffectiveness. To the public's surprise, and possibly also to the surprise of the opposition, the deposition of the mayor and his deputies was supported by four members of the coalition (Vácha, 2015). The reasons were reported to be personal ambitions, financial gain and lust for power (Nová, 2015). Again, the situation was used by ČSSD and ODS, who saw the opportunity to reassert their power in the new coalition.

No two cities seem to be so entangled in the inter/intra-party cohesion problems as Havířov and Frýdek-Místek. Havířov experienced two consecutive coalition breakdowns within a matter of months. The party charades began with three ANO coalition members

betraying their party and migrating to the other coalition party, thereby causing the first breakdown and establishment of a coalition of KSČM and ČSSD. The coalition crisis a few months later was focused on a fiery debate about finances, when ČSSD could not push through its vision of the city budget (ČTK, 2016b). The consequent internal feuds led the coalition into breakdown, during which ČSSD decided it wanted to secure the co-operation and support of ANO, which was reportedly easy to persuade (Pešek, 2016). Frýdek-Místek entered a vicious circle of coalition breakdowns early after the 2014 elections and never really exited it until the end of the election period. The indecent coalition-building tactics of ANO led to the first breakdown a few months after the elections, due to mistrust of coalition partner ČSSD. The feuds resulted in a complete disintegration of the ANO party club with two members effectively creating a second ANO party club, which was supposedly more 'true' to the declared programme. Shortly after, the original ANO club dissolved completely and the new club was admitted to the existing coalition as a new member (Štalmach, 2016). The city representation seemed to lack any sort of categorization on the political spectrum, as members of political parties formed several types of coalitions always based on personal relations with each other rather than on a political ideology or programme. And for the fourteenth time, even in the city of Havířov, the repeated coalition breakdowns were the result of lack of cohesion and discrepancies between the declared and actual coalition behaviour.

Table 1: Overview of statutory city coalitions 2014–2018

City	Coalition	Duration of coalition(s)	Breakdown	Cohesion
Prostějov	ČSSD, KSČM, PéVéčko	10/2014 – 10/2018	No	Intra/inter-party
Hradec Králové	ČSSD, TOP 09, Hradecký demokratický klub, Koalice pro Hradec	10/2014 – 10/2018	No	Intra/inter-party
Jablonec nad Nisou	ODS, ČSSD, TOP 09, Domov nad Nisou, Nová budoucnost	11/2014 – 10/2018	No	Intra/inter-party
Teplice	ČSSD, ODS, TOP 09	11/2014 – 10/2018	No	Intra/inter-party
Olomouc	ČSSD, ODS, TOP 09, KDU-ČSL	11/2014 – 10/2018	No	Intra/inter-party
Plzeň	ČSSD, ODS, KDU-ČSL, Občané patrioti	10/2014 – 10/2018	No	Intra/inter-party
Karviná	ČSSD, KSČM	10/2014 – 10/2018	No	Intra/inter-party
Mladá Boleslav	ODS, TOP 09, Volba pro MB, ANO	10/2014 – 10/2018	No	Intra/inter-party
Kladno	KSČM, Volba pro Kladno, ANO	10/2014 – 10/2018	No	Intra/inter-party
Zlín	STAN, ANO	10/2014 – 10/2018	No	Intra/inter-party
Pardubice	ANO, ČSSD, TOP 09, Koalice pro Pardubice	10/2014 – 10/2018	No	Intra/inter-party
Děčín	ANO, Volba pro město, ODS, Sportovci	11/2014 – 10/2018	No	Intra/inter-party
Ústí nad Labem	1) ANO, PRO Ústí 2) ANO, UFO	10/2014 – 6/2015 6/2015 – 10/2018	Yes No	Intra-party lack
Opava	1) ANO, Změna pro Opavu, KDU-ČSL, Starostové and ODS 2) Změna pro Opavu, KDU-ČSL, Sdružení nezávislých, ČSSD	10/2014 – 10/2015 12/2015 – 10/2018	Yes No	Intra-party lack

Ostrava	1) ANO, ČSSD, KDU-ČSL	10/2014 – 11/2015	Yes	Inter-party lack
	2) ANO, Ostravak, ODS, KDU-ČSL	11/2015 – 10/2018	No	
Chomutov	1) ANO, PRO Chomutov, KSČM	2/2015 ¹ – 12/2016	Yes	Inter-party lack
	2) ČSSD, ANO, KSČM, Nový sever	12/2016 – 10/2018	No	
Jihlava	1) ČSSD, ODS, KDU-ČSL, Forum Jihlava	10/2014 – 10/2016	Yes	Inter-party lack
	2) ČSSD, ANO, KDU-ČSL	11/2016 – 10/2018	No	
Přerov	1) ANO, Společně pro Přerov, Nezávislí, Uskupení za prosperitu	10/2014 – 9/2017	Yes	Inter-party lack
	2) minority governance	9/2017 – 10/2018	No	
Most	1) ANO, Severočeši, KSČM	10/2014 – 9/2015	Yes	Combination
	2) Severočeši, ČSSD, ODS	9/2015 – 10/2018	No	
Prague	1) ANO, ČSSD, Trojkoalice	10/2014 – 11/2015	Yes	Inter-party lack
	2) ANO, ČSSD, Trojkoalice	4/2016 – 10/2018	No	
Liberec	1) ANO, Změna pro Liberec	11/2014 – 4/2017	Yes	Inter-party lack
	2) minority governance	4/2017 – 10/2018	No	
Brno	1) ANO, Žit Brno, SZ, KDU-ČSL	11/2014 – 4/2016	Yes	Combination
	2) ANO, Žit Brno, SZ, KDU-ČSL, TOP 09	6/2016 – 10/2018	No	
Karlovy Vary	1) ANO, KOA, Karlovaráci	11/2014 – 4/2015	Yes	Combination
	2) ANO, KOA, ČSSD, KDU-ČSL	5/2015 – 10/2018	No	
České Budějovice	1) ANO, Hnutí občané pro Budějovice, TOP 09, KDU-ČSL	11/2014 – 6/2015	Yes	Inter-party lack
	2) ANO, ČSSD, KDU-ČSL, ODS	6/2015 – 10/2018	No	
Frýdek-Místek	1) ANO, ČSSD	11/2014 – 1/2015	Yes	Combination
	2) ČSSD, Naše město FM (KDU-ČSL, KSČM)	2/2015 – 9/2016	Yes	
	3) ČSSD, Naše město FM, ANO, (KDU-ČSL, KSČM)	1/2017 – 10/2018	No	
Haviřov	1) ANO, KSČM, Hnutí pro Haviřov	10/2014 – 6/2016	Yes	Inter-party lack
	2) KSČM, ČSSD	6/2016 – 12/2016	Yes	
	3) ČSSD, ANO, KDU-ČSL	12/2016 – 10/2018	No	

Source: The author

5. Conclusion

This article has reported on exploratory research of the phenomenon of frequent coalition breakdowns at the municipal level in statutory cities of the Czech Republic, within the election period 2014–2018. Specific attention has been given to the role of the ANO party in the coalition breakdowns, as its presence was the new variable in Czech local politics in the studied period, in order to answer the research question: How does the coalition behaviour of the ANO party influence the stability of local government coalitions? This article compared all the Czech cities, both those having successful coalitions and those experiencing a coalition breakdown, using the criterion of cohesion, which indicates the level of loyalty and collaborative arrangement inside the party and inside the coalition. The article separated the unsuccessful coalition outcomes into those failing due to lack of

intra-party cohesion, inter-party cohesion or a combination of both factors. The analysis and summary in *Table 1* show that cohesion is indeed the contributing factor of successful networks within a party and, further, within coalitions, and its lack causes internal factionalization of parties and among individuals as coalition members – coalitions at the local level are leadership-based networks and if successful, they ensure collaboration through mutual trust, respect and conformity.

Empirical evidence shows that local coalition governments in the Czech cities mostly thrived when governed by traditional parties with a well-established political identity, organizational rules and respected hierarchy, all of which translates into coalition cooperation. ANO introduced a previously unseen individualistic form of politics with a high fluctuation of representatives, career ambitions, and lack of party and leader loyalty. The only two cases of cities where ANO succeeded as the strongest majority-holding coalition member, were due to the cohesive factor of local leadership, through which well-known mayors used the ANO party as a stepping stone in elections. However, once in office, the mayors governed with high levels of organization and trust due to already-established ties among former colleagues and knowledge of local politics. In most cases, the traditional parties in power guaranteed intra/inter-party cohesion by well-established internal and external political networks, respected leadership, organizational rules, established hierarchy and political identity. However, when ANO was entrusted with building and maintaining the coalition in local governments, its presence almost always created a crisis followed by a coalition breakdown. At the same time, the ANO party performed exceptionally well in election campaigns and election battles, where they masterfully used election programme promises to their advantage. They indeed exercised a high level of leadership and communication skills but only in said pre-election competition. Once peaceful post-election coalition cooperation should have been established, their presence in local politics was rather destructive. Unfortunately, the citizens of the affected cities were the ones who took the toll for these governance experiments.

The long-term and short-term effects and implications of the described coalition breakdowns are a topic for a much more extensive research, as is the proper in-depth analysis of each of the cases of coalition breakdown. This article has tried to achieve only the most descriptive and general goal, which was to provide the first comparative overview of coalition breakdowns in Czech cities within the election period 2014–2018. More research should also be gathered in the area of political networks specifically applied to the case of the ANO party, in order to understand if and how confidence, trust and political conformity develop between party members. Further attention should be paid to the time validity of such research, since the breaking point between ‘new’ and ‘traditional’ is a matter of precise analysis. Such a definition could greatly aid the research, and perhaps even help prevent coalition breakdowns caused by inexperienced and power-hungry populist political groups such as ANO. Finally, comparison of coalition breakdowns across time and governance levels is necessary to enhance the basis of research in the field of Czech political science.²

Footnotes:

1. The first coalition formed after repeated local elections on January 20.
2. Further research is currently being carried out on each of the cities in case studies in order to assess not only the reasons and processes of coalition breakdowns but also their consequences for city administration and public policy in the long term.

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